

CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Name:	Northwestern Energy DoubleTree Utility Relocation
Proposed Implementation Date:	Summer/Fall 2023
Proponent:	Northwestern Energy
Location:	Clark Fork River Crossing within the SW4, of Section 22, T13N-R19W
County:	Missoula

I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

Northwestern Energy has submitted an easement application. The proposed easement would be 20' wide X 129 feet long. A 8" diameter pipe would be directionally drilled approximately 20 feet below the riverbed in the Clark Fork River. The approximate bore distance will be 900 feet (only 129 feet within DNRC jurisdiction). The proposal would replace an existing intermediate pressure line that runs through the Double Tree Hotel.

Montana Code (MCA 70-16-201) provides for state ownership from the low water mark to the low water mark on navigable water bodies. Based on historical evidence, the Clark Fork River is commercially navigable from Deer Lodge, Montana to the Idaho state line. Therefore, the state claims ownership of the riverbed below the low water mark between these two points.

II. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

1. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT, AGENCIES, GROUPS OR INDIVIDUALS CONTACTED:

Provide a brief chronology of the scoping and ongoing involvement for this project. List number of individuals contacted, number of responses received, and newspapers in which notices were placed and for how long. Briefly summarize issues received from the public.

Affected landowners along the proposed route of the natural gas line have been contacted by Northwestern Energy. DNRC ownership is limited to the land below the low water mark at the Clark Fork River crossing.

Wildlife biologist Garrett Schairer was consulted for this project.

2. OTHER GOVERNMENTAL AGENCIES WITH JURISDICTION, LIST OF PERMITS NEEDED:

Examples: cost-share agreement with U.S. Forest Service, 124 Permit, 3A Authorization, Air Quality Major Open Burning Permit.

None

3. ALTERNATIVE DEVELOPMENT:

Describe alternatives considered and, if applicable, provide brief description of how the alternatives were developed. List alternatives that were considered but eliminated from further analysis and why.

The No Action Alternative – DNRC would not grant an easement for relocating a natural gas line under the Clark Fork River. The existing easement location would continue to be used.

The Action Alternative – DNRC would grant an easement for a natural gas line under the Clark Fork river. In addition the existing natural gas easement would be abandoned in place.

III. IMPACTS ON THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

- *RESOURCES potentially impacted are listed on the form, followed by common issues that would be considered.*
- *Explain POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATIONS following each resource heading.*
- *Enter "NONE" if no impacts are identified or the resource is not present.*

4. GEOLOGY AND SOIL QUALITY, STABILITY AND MOISTURE:

Consider the presence of fragile, compactable or unstable soils. Identify unusual geologic features. Specify any special reclamation considerations. Identify direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to soils.

No Action: No effects

Proposed Action: Directional drilling would occur below and across the Clark Fork River at a depth of 20 feet below the lowest elevation of the bed of the Clark Fork River. No unusual geologic features are known in the area or are expected to be encountered by the proposed action.

Impacts to geologic features, soil quality, stability, and moisture within the DNRC Navigable Water jurisdiction are not anticipated with this project.

5. WATER QUALITY, QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION:

Identify important surface or groundwater resources. Consider the potential for violation of ambient water quality standards, drinking water maximum contaminant levels, or degradation of water quality. Identify direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to water resources.

Surface water would not be encountered by the proposed action. Directional bore would pass through groundwater when it crosses under the riverbed. The proposal would require the contractors to use a water based mud with bentonite clay as this will be non-toxic and consist of natural materials. Contractors would be prohibited from using any environmentally non-compatible polymers or oils as additives to the mud. The drillers would be required to dispose of spent drilling mud and other spoils at a designated disposal site to prevent any releases of these materials to the river (this would be outside of DNRC jurisdiction).

6. AIR QUALITY:

What pollutants or particulate would be produced (i.e. particulate matter from road use or harvesting, slash pile burning, prescribed burning, etc)? Identify the Airshed and Impact Zone (if any) according to the Montana/Idaho Airshed Group. Identify direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to air quality.

The project would be short in duration. Some temporary emission releases would be expected during construction activities; however, air quality would not be impacted to any measurable degree.

7. VEGETATION COVER, QUANTITY AND QUALITY:

What changes would the action cause to vegetative communities? Consider rare plants or cover types that would be affected. Identify direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to vegetation.

The State jurisdiction lies below the low water mark of the Clark Fork river and does not support terrestrial vegetation. The proposal calls for boring under the riverbed, thus there would be no impact to either terrestrial or aquatic vegetation on state trust land.

8. TERRESTRIAL, AVIAN AND AQUATIC LIFE AND HABITATS:

Consider substantial habitat values and use of the area by wildlife, birds or fish. Identify direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to fish and wildlife.

Limited habitats for terrestrial wildlife exist in the project area. Surrounding uplands and riparian habitats likely support a variety of wildlife species, but human disturbance in the vicinity has reduced overall species use of these habitats through time.

No Action: No disturbance to terrestrial wildlife would occur. No changes to existing habitats would be anticipated. Collectively, no effects to terrestrial wildlife would be anticipated.

Proposed Action: Some short-duration disturbance to terrestrial wildlife could occur, but would occur outside of the breeding, nesting, or wintering periods when individuals could be more affected by potential disturbance. No appreciable changes to existing habitats on DNRC-managed lands would be anticipated, small changes to habitats on other ownerships would occur. Collectively, negligible effects to terrestrial wildlife would be anticipated.

Fisheries

Action Alternative: This would be an underground natural gas line. No in stream activities would occur. No impacts to fisheries would be expected.

9. UNIQUE, ENDANGERED, FRAGILE OR LIMITED ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES:

Consider any federally listed threatened or endangered species or habitat identified in the project area. Determine effects to wetlands. Consider Sensitive Species or Species of special concern. Identify direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to these species and their habitat.

Existing Conditions: Terrestrial and Avian Wildlife

Limited habitats for terrestrial wildlife exist in the project area. Some use of the project area by bald eagles could occur. Surrounding riparian habitats likely support a variety of wildlife species, including common species as well as less common species such as great blue herons, yellow-billed cuckoos, and pileated woodpeckers. Proximity to human developments and other forms of human disturbance likely limits some wildlife use of the vicinity.

No Action: No disturbance to terrestrial wildlife would occur. No changes to existing habitats would be anticipated. Collectively, no effects to terrestrial wildlife would be anticipated.

Proposed Action: Some short-duration disturbance to terrestrial wildlife could occur. Proposed activities would occur outside of the bald eagle nesting season, but some disturbance to foraging bald eagles could occur. The proposed activities would occur during the late summer or fall, which would be expected to occur outside of the nesting period for numerous sensitive avian species that could be using habitats on adjacent ownerships. No appreciable changes in bald eagle prey species would be anticipated. No appreciable changes to existing habitats for other species would be anticipated. Collectively, negligible effects to terrestrial threatened, endangered, or sensitive wildlife species would be anticipated.

Fisheries

Action Alternative

DNRC jurisdiction in the project area is limited to below the low water mark. No appreciable changes to existing habitats on DNRC-managed lands would be anticipated.

Bull Trout: Bull trout is a federally threatened species and occurs in the Clark Fork River that is over the crossing. No changes to existing fisheries would be expected to occur, as this is an underground natural gas line that would be 20 feet below the riverbed.

10. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES:

Identify and determine direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to historical, archaeological or paleontological resources.

Proposed Action: Because only the bed of the Clark Fork River is state-owned land in the project's area of potential effect, there are no cultural resource concerns. Issuance of an easement will have No Effect to state owned heritage properties as defined in the State Antiquities Act.

11. AESTHETICS:

Determine if the project is located on a prominent topographic feature, or may be visible from populated or scenic areas. What level of noise, light or visual change would be produced? Identify direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to aesthetics.

Proposed Action: The proposal to drill/bore under the river (out of sight) would not cause additional impacts to the aesthetics of the river corridor.

12. DEMANDS ON ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES OF LAND, WATER, AIR OR ENERGY:

Determine the amount of limited resources the project would require. Identify other activities nearby that the project would affect. Identify direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to environmental resources.

None

13. OTHER ENVIRONMENTAL DOCUMENTS PERTINENT TO THE AREA:

List other studies, plans or projects on this tract. Determine cumulative impacts likely to occur as a result of current private, state or federal actions in the analysis area, and from future proposed state actions in the analysis area that are under MEPA review (scoped) or permitting review by any state agency.

None

IV. IMPACTS ON THE HUMAN POPULATION
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• RESOURCES potentially impacted are listed on the form, followed by common issues that would be considered.• Explain POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATIONS following each resource heading.• Enter "NONE" if no impacts are identified or the resource is not present.

14. HUMAN HEALTH AND SAFETY:

Identify any health and safety risks posed by the project.

No Action: The existing natural gas line is located under the Double Tree hotel.

Proposed Action: The proposal would abandon in place the existing line and locate a new natural gas line out from under the hotel.

15. INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL AND AGRICULTURE ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTION:

Identify how the project would add to or alter these activities.

No change from the existing condition other than the natural gas line would no longer be located underneath a hotel.

16. QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF EMPLOYMENT:

Estimate the number of jobs the project would create, move or eliminate. Identify direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to the employment market.

The proposed project would be anticipated to provide a short-term employment opportunity for a small crew of people while construction activities occur.

17. LOCAL AND STATE TAX BASE AND TAX REVENUES:

Estimate tax revenue the project would create or eliminate. Identify direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to taxes and revenue.

None. Minor, if any, change in tax base and tax revenues would be anticipated.

18. DEMAND FOR GOVERNMENT SERVICES:

Estimate increases in traffic and changes to traffic patterns. What changes would be needed to fire protection, police, schools, etc.? Identify direct, indirect, and cumulative effects of this and other projects on government services

None

19. LOCALLY ADOPTED ENVIRONMENTAL PLANS AND GOALS:

List State, County, City, USFS, BLM, Tribal, and other zoning or management plans, and identify how they would affect this project.

None

20. ACCESS TO AND QUALITY OF RECREATIONAL AND WILDERNESS ACTIVITIES:

Identify any wilderness or recreational areas nearby or access routes through this tract. Determine the effects of the project on recreational potential within the tract. Identify direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to recreational and wilderness activities.

The proposed project would be underground beneath the channel and would not pose an impediment to navigability or create a safety hazard to boating or floating on the river.

21. DENSITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF POPULATION AND HOUSING:

Estimate population changes and additional housing the project would require. Identify direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to population and housing.

Direct effects on population and housing would be estimated to be minimal.

22. SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND MORES:

Identify potential disruption of native or traditional lifestyles or communities.

None

23. CULTURAL UNIQUENESS AND DIVERSITY:

How would the action affect any unique quality of the area?

None

24. OTHER APPROPRIATE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CIRCUMSTANCES:

Estimate the return to the trust. Include appropriate economic analysis. Identify potential future uses for the analysis area other than existing management. Identify direct, indirect, and cumulative economic and social effects likely to occur as a result of the proposed action.

No Action: The existing natural gas line runs underneath the Double Tree Hotel.

Proposed Action: Granting of the proposed easement would return approximately \$2,228 to the Public Land-Navigable Rivers trust. In addition, this project would abandon in place the existing line and construct a new natural gas line that does not run underneath a building.

EA Checklist Prepared By:	Name: Amy Helena	Date: July 3, 2023
	Title: Missoula Unit Manager	

V. FINDING

25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:

I select the action alternative; granting an easement of State-owned property below the low water mark of the Clark Fork River, thereby accommodating the installation of an underground utility line as proposed by North Western Energy.

26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:

The action alternative will not result in significant environmental impacts.

27. NEED FOR FURTHER ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

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EIS

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More Detailed EA

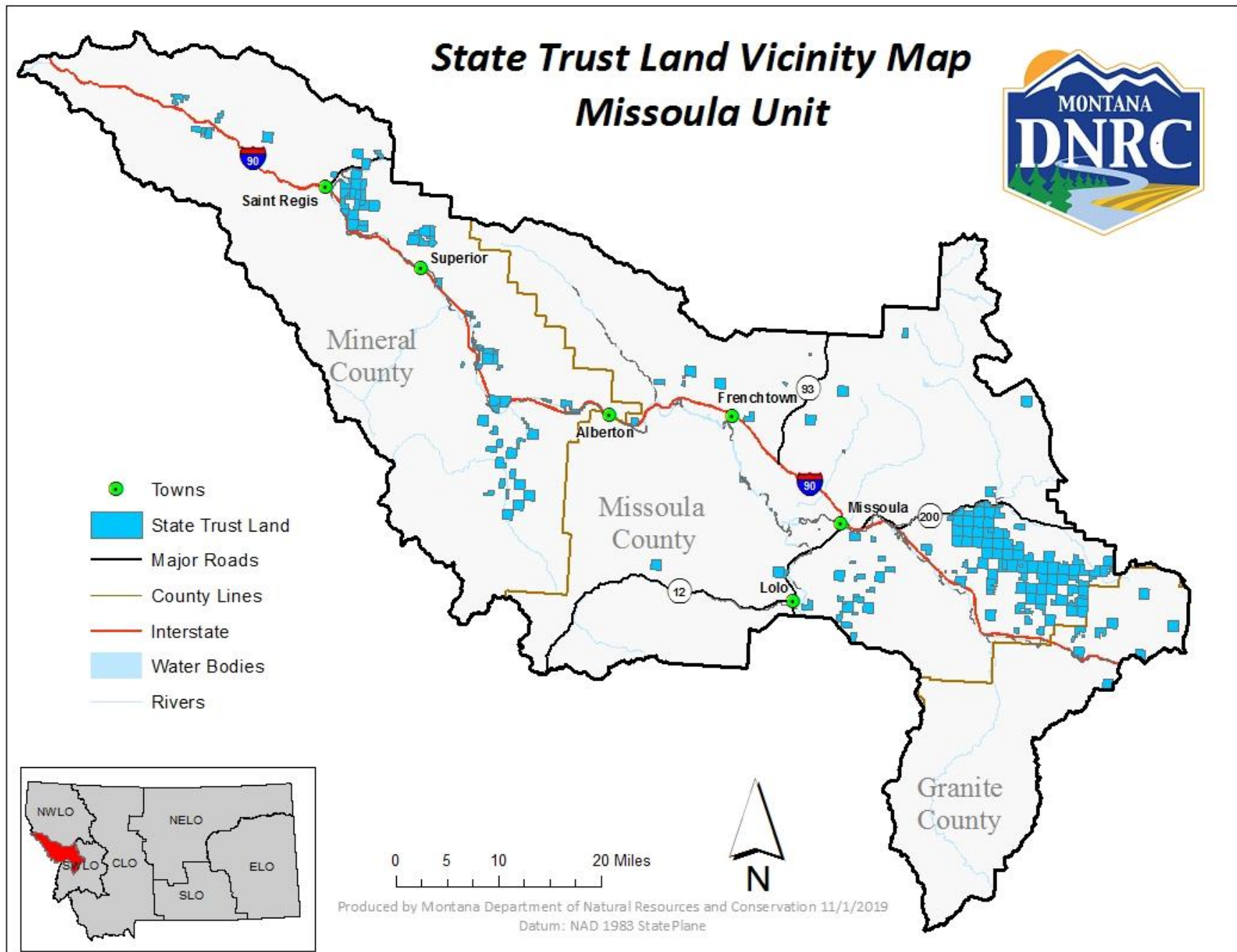
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No Further Analysis

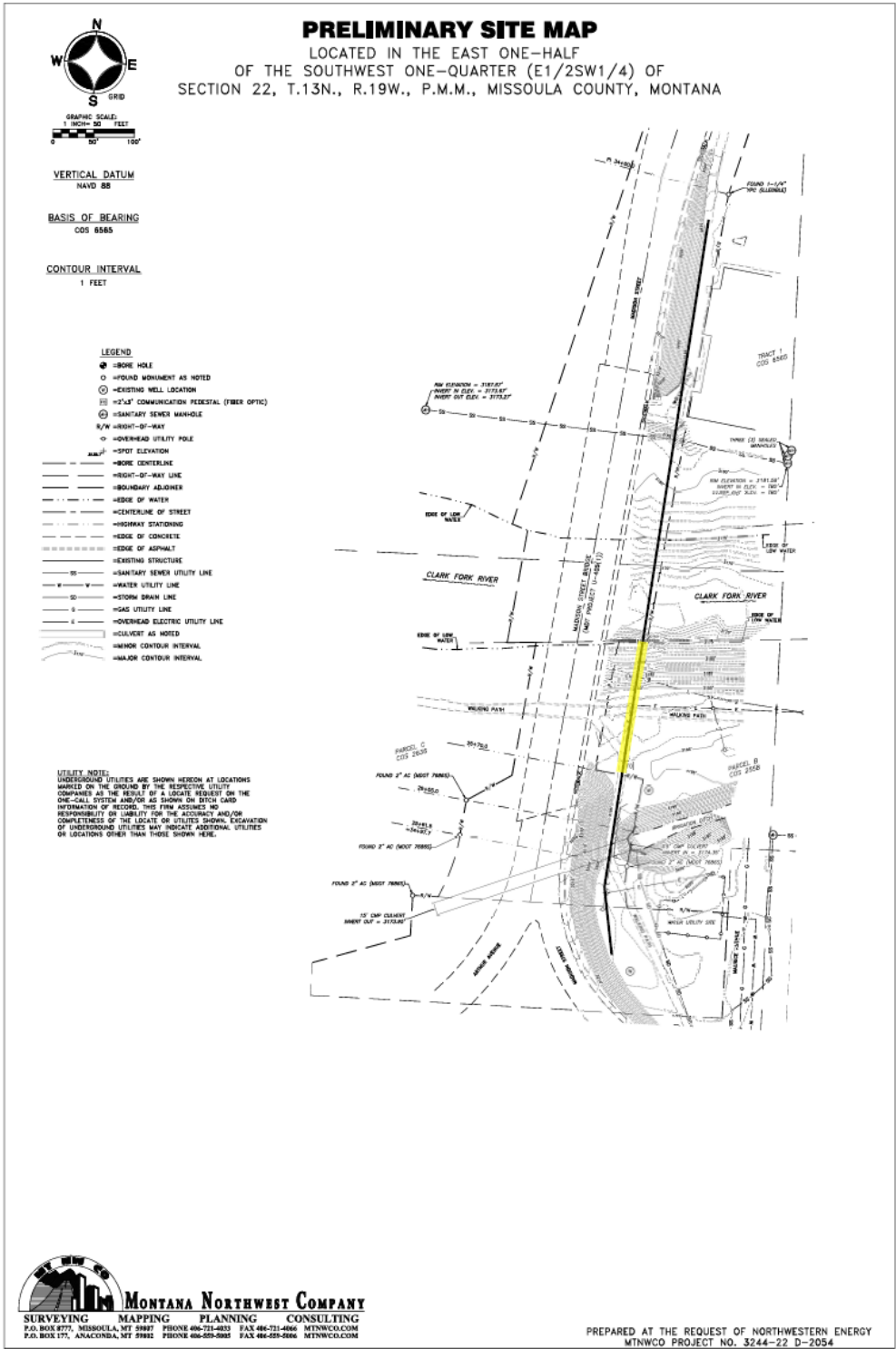
EA Checklist Approved By:	Name: Sierra Farmer
	Title: Trustlands Program Manager
Signature: 	Date: 7/6/2023

A-1: Vicinity Map

Relocation
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A-2 SRSD proposal diagram



A-3 Proposal Aerial view

